

ANGLER GUIDE

FISHING PROSPECTS FOR STREAMS IN THE SALT RIVER WATERSHED

Although several stream reaches in the watershed have been degraded by localized channelization, gravel mining, and siltation, many areas of high quality fish habitat remain. In addition, streams in the basin provide a wide array of fishing opportunities. Streams in the uppermost portion of the basin are relatively small, but fishable pools are scattered between shallow riffles and sand bars. Public access is limited to county and state road bridge crossings. In these isolated pools, anglers can expect to catch carp, medium-sized channel catfish, sunfish, and small black bass.

All major streams provide good to excellent fishing for several species, often in association with spectacular scenery. Anglers using a variety of methods and focusing on good pools with woody or rocky habitats can expect to encounter channel catfish, flathead catfish, carp, sunfish, crappie, freshwater drum, and small black bass in the North Fork, Middle Fork, South Fork, and Elk Fork rivers. White bass and walleye can also provide seasonally good fishing in these streams, especially during March and April. The Elk Fork Salt River provides one of the best smallmouth bass fishing opportunities in all of northeast Missouri. Many reaches in all of these streams are floatable by small boat or canoe, but during low flow conditions there will be a more frequent need to drag watercraft through gravel riffles or around debris than in popular Ozark float streams. But unlike the Ozarks, anglers will experience isolation, litter-free beauty, and near-wilderness conditions within the forested river corridor, in addition to good fishing for a wide variety of species. Public access is available at several developed access areas (see Table 3).

The lower Salt River downstream of Mark Twain Lake and the reregulation dam also provides diverse fishing opportunities. Water levels along this part of the river can vary greatly, on short notice, due to releases from Mark Twain Lake, so anglers should pay close attention to changing water conditions. This area is floatable by small watercraft and much of it is floatable by larger craft as the stream approaches its confluence with the Mississippi River. Because of its connection to the Mississippi River, anglers can expect to encounter a wide variety of fish species including flathead catfish, channel catfish, carp, crappie, walleye, sauger, freshwater drum, paddlefish, and exotic Asian carp. The area immediately downstream of the reregulation dam is one of the most popular fishing spots in the area and is easily fished from land, although a boat ramp is also available. Reaches further downstream also provide good wade fishing for largemouth bass and smallmouth bass. Tributaries of the lower Salt River can provide good fishing as well. Spencer Creek and Peno Creek are excellent wade fishing streams where anglers can catch largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, and sunfishes. Public access along these streams is mostly limited to county road crossings, but a one and a half mile reach of Peno Creek flows through Ranacker CA.